

European workers rally: The French “left” and the building of a new revolutionary party

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On September 17, the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party—PSG) held a European workers rally against racism, war and social cutbacks at the conclusion of the party’s election campaign in Berlin. Representatives of the PSG and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) spoke on the crisis of capitalism, the program of the PSG and the significance of the PSG election campaign.

We are publishing the most important contributions at the rally. This contribution is from Kumaran Ira, a member of the WSWs editorial board in France.

On behalf of the supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International in France, I bring my warmest greetings to the final meeting of the campaign conducted by the Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit—PSG) in the Berlin Senate election. The campaign has been followed closely and enthusiastically by our supporters.

The PSG’s election campaign is of immense significance not only for the German, but for the international working class. The central axis of the campaign involved explaining to voters in Berlin the international character of the capitalist crisis that drives the social attacks on the working people. The election campaign established that the fundamental problems facing the working class in Berlin and internationally, such as employment, decent wages, housing and other basic needs, can only be realized through socialist means.

The PSG and the other sections of the ICFI are the only political forces fighting to defend the historical continuity of Trotskyism and Marxism, fighting for principled revolutionary politics based on the international working class.

Over half a century, the ICFI has struggled relentlessly against middle class tendencies that politically strangled the working class and tied it to a pro-capitalist perspective, while masquerading as socialist or even Trotskyist.

These fake left organizations such as the Left Party in Germany and France’s New-Anti Capitalist Party (NPA) have been exposed by their hostile reaction to the revolutionary struggles that are now shaking the Arab world. They give support to the transitional governments in Egypt and Tunisia. They claim that these counterrevolutionary, military-backed regimes represent a democratic process while they are repressing workers and youth

demanding a second revolution. As workers rise up against social inequality and political dictatorship, these parties have instead backed the imperialist war in Libya.

Their pro-imperialist policies find clearest expression in the line of the French New-Anti Capitalist Party. The NPA is the successor party of the LCR (the Revolutionary Communist League), which dissolved itself and formed the NPA in 2009. For 40 years, LCR falsely claimed to be Trotskyist, while repudiating the basic principles of Trotskyism. When the NPA was founded, it explicitly repudiated even any formal association with Trotskyism.

At the time, we explained the class significance of this move. The NPA was trying to establish ties with other bourgeois parties and to enter directly into the service of French imperialism.

The NPA’s reaction to the explosion of revolutionary working class struggles in Tunisia, Egypt and the entire Middle East confirmed this analysis. In particular, the NPA adopted the bourgeois media’s line that the NATO war in Libya aimed to protect the Libyan population. Openly disdainful of the conceptions of class and imperialism developed by the Marxist movement, the NPA claimed that NATO’s toppling of Gaddafi would pave the way for democracy in Libya.

As France launched air strikes against Tripoli in March, the NPA’s support for the war found expression in the writings of Gilbert Achcar, a member of the international Pabloite United Secretariat affiliated to the NPA and a professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. He wrote: “Here is a case where a population is truly in danger and where there is no plausible alternative that could protect it ... You can’t in the name of anti-imperialist principles oppose an action that will prevent the massacre of civilians.”

The NPA presented the western-backed NTC (National Transitional Council) as a revolutionary force for democracy. In fact, the NTC is led by various right-wing elements: ex-ministers of the Gaddafi regime, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group linked to Al Qaeda, CIA assets, and various Libyan tribal leaders.

From the outset of the war, the NPA called on the imperialist powers to provide arms to the NTC rebels. As it turned out, French imperialism accepted the NPA’s advice, dropping large quantities of weapons to rebels particularly in the western Nafusa Mountains south of Tripoli. These forces played a critical role in taking over Tripoli.

Some days before the fall of Tripoli on August 21, Achcar denounced NATO for not bombing Libya with sufficient force,

especially compared to the war in Kosovo. He approvingly cited ultra-right *Wall Street Journal* columnist Max Boot, who complained that NATO air forces should have carried out more than the 11,107 sorties by NATO bombers against Libya, especially since they had carried out 38,004 sorties during the bombing of Kosovo.

Achcar commented, “The crucial questions are then: why is NATO conducting an aerial campaign in Libya that is low key not only in comparison with the air component of the war to grab similarly oil-rich Iraq, but even compared to the air war for economically unimportant Kosovo? And why is the alliance at the same time refraining from providing the insurgents with the weaponry they have consistently and insistently requested?”

His comment is absurd. NATO’s slaughter in Libya is not “low key”—this is a fiction that Achcar invented to present the NPA’s support for the slaughter in a pseudo-oppositional light.

The conduct of the Libyan war has exposed the fraudulent claim that the war aimed to “protect civilians.” In fact, the imperialist intervention has cost approximately 50,000 lives—according to estimates by NTC leaders—and the NTC is carrying out racist reprisals against immigrant African workers.

Using the cover of defending “human rights”, NATO is installing a right-wing puppet regime subservient to the Western powers and their oil corporations. At the same time, the subjugation of Libya is aimed at suppressing working class struggles in neighboring countries such as in Tunisia and Egypt.

Now the race is on among the imperialist powers to seize Libya’s oil. The French oil firm Total is reportedly signing contracts to obtain a 35 percent stake in Libyan crude oil.

Nonetheless, the NPA hailed the fall of Tripoli as “good news.” Covering up the atrocities carried out by NATO-led forces, it advanced the following absurd and reactionary lie: “It is a new life that is opening up for the Libyan people. Liberty, democratic rights, and the use of wealth produced by natural resources to satisfy the fundamental needs of the people are now on the agenda.”

In the final analysis, the basic position of the NPA on the Libyan war is no different from that of the most powerful and reactionary sections of world imperialism. As the Bush administration did while invading Iraq, the NPA claims that imperialist war can help bring about democratic change. It has placed itself squarely in the camp of social reaction.

This support for imperialist war exposes the reactionary character of ex-left parties like the NPA, drawn from affluent layers of the middle class—including academics, union bureaucrats, and media personalities—who function as a new constituency for imperialism.

From the beginning, the PSG and the ICFI opposed the war against Libya and explained that imperialist war abroad is inseparable from the ruling elite’s assault on the living standards and rights of the workers at home in Europe. As it has supported the Libyan war, the NPA has also supported the ruling class’s assault on the working class and democratic rights.

The NPA joined France’s trade unions in betraying last autumn’s strikes against President Nicolas Sarkozy’s pension cuts. As police moved in to smash refinery strikes that had been

isolated by the union bureaucracy, the NPA insisted that there should only be “playful” protests against the strike-breaking. The NPA did not want workers to defy the Sarkozy government and fight to mobilize the entire working class in defense of its social rights.

Instead, the NPA tried to cover the betrayal of the union bureaucracy, which had negotiated the pension cuts with Sarkozy.

The Sarkozy government has deliberately encouraged anti-immigrant hatreds to divide the working class along ethnic lines and defuse popular opposition to his policies. He has imposed an anti-democratic and unconstitutional ban on wearing the burqa, and carried out mass expulsions of the Roma. The NPA has made no attempt to challenge this anti-democratic policy, carried out with the complicity of France’s Socialist Party and other bourgeois “left” parties with whom the NPA seeks political alliances.

Amid the deepening crisis of capitalism and of the Sarkozy government, the NPA itself now plays a significant role in oppressing the working class. Whether as a potential partner in a future Socialist Party government, or as a loyal opposition, it will do its part to help carry out the bourgeoisie’s policies of war and social austerity.

In the coming months, the emergence of class struggles are on the agenda here and throughout Europe as the ruling elite attempts to impose massive social cuts, while promoting nationalism and chauvinism to divide the working class.

Forces such as the Left Party and the NPA are playing a dominant role in disarming the working class and propping up bourgeois rule against the threat of social revolution.

French and German workers face the same problems. Sarkozy and German chancellor Angela Merkel are united in their determination to destroy the rights and living standards of the working class and to prosecute imperialist wars of colonial oppression. The French and German workers must unite with workers throughout Europe against the disastrous policies of European capitalism. This means a complete break with the bourgeois “left” and their petty bourgeois hangers-on.

The ICFI and its supporters seek to break the stranglehold of this right-wing petty-bourgeois politics over the working class and build a revolutionary leadership for the proletariat.

I would like to conclude my speech by urging you to vote the PSG, support its program, build it as the vanguard of the European working class, and struggle to overthrow capitalism and establish the United Socialist States of Europe.



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